

# **Interim Report on the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Fiscal Year 2006**

## **Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture**

### **Introduction**

The Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) at the national level. Within the participating States, the FFVP is administered through the State Departments of Education with the exception of Texas which is administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture.

The FFVP continues to be successful in introducing and providing fresh fruits and vegetables to school children. An integral part of the Program's popularity has been the introduction and expansion of curricula on nutrition education, and the support and outreach of the school administration, parents and community. The various partnerships that FNS and State agencies have developed in the public and private sectors, as well as the dedicated work of school administrators, have contributed to the overall success and acceptance of the program. These partnerships and relationships support the FFVP through such things as field trips, educational school programs and materials made available to the schools. Anecdotal information gleaned from schools and State agencies helps to demonstrate the FFVP can be a catalyst for improving the eating habits of children.

FNS and representatives from FFVP States, participating schools and local and national partners met in Seattle, Washington, in June 2006 to discuss and share information on the Program's operation. The meeting was held in conjunction with our partners: Center for Disease Control's 5-A-Day, United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, and Produce for Better Health. Enthusiasm and support for the FFVP were overwhelming and participating States were anxious to share their success stories. The meeting also generated much interest from non-participating States.

### **Background**

The FFVP initially began as a pilot project under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171: May 13, 2002). The Act authorized \$6 million for the purchase of fresh and dried fruits and fresh vegetables in the following 4 States: Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio and one Indian Tribal Organization (ITO), the Zuni Tribe in New Mexico. The purpose of the pilot was to determine the best practices for increasing fresh and dried fruit and fresh vegetable consumption in schools. The pilot project was popular and many States expressed interest in participating.

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-265; June 30, 2004) permanently authorized the FFVP and expanded the program to include four additional States and two additional ITOs. The Act authorized \$9 million each fiscal year starting in 2005 and authorized 25 schools in each of the eight States to participate and a

total of 25 schools among the three ITOs. The permanent FFVP States are: Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, New Mexico (the Zuni), Mississippi, Washington, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Dakota (the Oglala Sioux Tribe), and Arizona (the Gila River Pima Community and the Tohona O'odham which are members of the Inter-Tribal Council).

Agricultural Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2006, (Public Law 109-97), appropriated an additional \$6 million and added six additional States. The States are: Connecticut, Wisconsin, Texas, New Mexico (New Mexico participates as an ITO and state), Idaho and Utah. These six states began the FFVP in January 2006, and will continue operations under the current agreements through the end of the 2006-2007 school year, June 30, 2007. Since these six States are funded only through the appropriations process, they are not part of the permanent FFVP.

Currently there are a grand total of 375 schools participating in the FFVP.

### **Reports to Congress on the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program**

The Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS) conducted an evaluation of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot program and issued a Report to Congress in May 2003. The report reflected the overwhelming popularity of the program and the desire for schools to continue participating.

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released results of an evaluation of a Mississippi FFVP funded by CDC. Study conclusions are limited by the evaluation design and the pilot nature of the evaluation but they suggest that the program might have had positive impacts on student attitudes, preferences and eating behaviors among secondary students, but might be less successful at impacting 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. Further research is needed to better understand the program benefits and how to further improve the FFVP.

Funding is not available to conduct extensive analysis and data collection for the current Program. However, Congress has mandated an annual report. The FFVP has maintained key elements and commonalities with the pilot program operation, including basic program structure, serving times and delivery methods. FNS created a simplified format in which some of these same elements can be captured by Program administrators and reported to FNS. We reviewed hundreds of FFVP reimbursement claims, which include observations provided by food service staff and parents and year end reports from each school. In addition, ongoing conversations with Program representatives and State staff who administer the FFVP supplement the information reported to us. It is apparent that the students' exposure to fresh produce through the FFVP leads to a greater willingness to make more healthful choices. Food service staff and teachers see that students make more healthful choices during lunch. Parents too have reported that their children more frequently request fresh produce or a particular item they sampled in school.

This report is a summary of monthly reimbursement claim reports submitted by each of the 375 participating schools and of program operations gathered from reviews of each school's year end report. The schools responded to 9 questions which included items offered, delivery methods and nutrition education efforts.

### **Program Management and Implementation**

Program management and implementation processes remain constant from the previous year of FFVP operations. Participating schools must offer fresh or dried fruit and fresh vegetables but have flexibility in selecting which items to offer.

FNS distributed the FFVP proportionately among all participating schools on the basis of enrollment. The per student allocation for FY 2006 for the eleven permanent States was approximately \$79. The per student allocation in FY 2006 for the six FFVP States added through appropriations was approximately \$75. Schools with 100 or fewer students remain funded at the rate of \$100 per student.

Schools generally may not use more than 10 percent of the program funds for administrative costs, which include equipment purchases.

In FY 2006, FNS instituted a mentoring program and paired each of the six new FFVP states with one of the more experienced states already in the program. This provided them the opportunity to draw from an experienced resource. Additionally, FNS has created a FFVP Partner Web intranet site which allows participating schools to exchange ideas, seek assistance and interact with one another. The Partner Web also allows FNS to easily provide information and resources to all participating states and schools.

FNS has regular conference calls with all participating States and our partners to discuss operations, funding procedures and hear any questions or updates from the participants. Monthly conference calls continue to support program implementation and management.

### **Delivery Methods**

There were no major deviations from the previous year's popular delivery methods: classroom service, kiosks, and free vending machines. The most popular venue remains classroom service, followed by cafeteria and kiosk service. Classroom service has created cleaning issues; however schools have managed to successfully address this issue and do not consider it an insurmountable obstacle. Teachers with existing FFVPs and those who were new to the program enjoyed this method of delivery as it afforded them the opportunity to incorporate an educational component with the distribution of fruits and vegetables.

While classroom delivery remained the most popular, many schools preferred the flexibility of a variety of delivery approaches in order to accommodate changing schedules.

### **Timing of Service Delivery**

Schools have available a variety of timeframes during the school day in which to provide fresh produce. We continued to see that the timeframes most preferred were in the morning soon after the school day began, or after lunch but before the end of the school day. Many schools choose to provide produce several times a day.

### **Key Factors to Program Success**

The key factors to program success remain: the commitment of school and district administration to support the FFVP, student and parent involvement, the ability to purchase a variety of fresh produce, partnerships with local farmers, use of prepackaged items, and positive publicity in the community about the program.

Schools that have several years of experience in FFVP operations note that because students have had several years exposure to fresh produce and accompanying nutrition education, they look forward to the fruits and vegetables that are offered and are starting to think more about a healthy diet.

The level of State support and partnerships with non-school partners were also cited as contributing factors to program success. Additionally we have seen that FFVP States and schools are procuring their produce through USDA's arrangement with the Department of Defense (DOD).

### **FFVP Popularity**

The FFVP continues to remain popular among students, parents, school and foodservice staff. Many schools continued in the program from the previous year. Anecdotal information from these schools indicates a noticeable shift in students' preferences from processed, high calorie and high fat snack foods to fruits and vegetables. Students are also making healthier choices in their lunches brought from home. Additionally, parents report they see a carryover at home of this healthier trend as children request fresh fruits and vegetables for their home meals.

States that solicit applications each year for participation in the FFVP continue to be overwhelmed by applications and interest in the program. In accordance with provisions in the law, priority in the newly participating States was given to schools with 50 percent or more of their children eligible for free and reduced price meals and those schools that had partnered with one or more non-Federal entity for program support. States continue to express a preference to have more than 25 schools per State participate.

### **Educational or Promotional Activities**

More States than in the previous years of operation have required, as part of their application process, a detailed nutrition education plan. Schools varied in the extent and type of activities for integrating nutrition education and promotion with school activities and events. Some schools incorporated nutrition education into numerous daily classroom activities -- math, health, geography and science. For example, some schools

highlighted a fruit or vegetable each week and developed lesson plans as well as school announcements and activities focused around that particular item. As in the previous year of operation, schools report that the Team Nutrition (TN) initiative and the TN publication *Fruits & Vegetables Galore: Helping Kids Eat More* remain extremely useful for promoting fruit and vegetable consumption.

### **Most Popular Fruits**

The most popular fruits offered have not changed significantly from the previous year. Berries, apples, bananas, pineapple, and grapes were again noted as the most popular. We have seen within certain fruits, such as apples, oranges and pears that schools include several varieties. For example, four or five types of apples are offered. In addition, schools are introducing more exotic types of fruits such as pomellos, kumquats, and star fruit.

### **Most Popular Vegetables**

The most popular vegetables remain constant from the previous year: carrots, celery, broccoli and cauliflower. These are often served with dip. Schools are being creative by offering students less known vegetables such as broccoflower and jicama.